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THE EMPTY HOURS



Ed
McBAIN

Three chillers from the 87th Precinct

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The Empty Hours

* * * *

They thought she was colored at first.

The patrolman who investigated the complaint didn't expect to find a dead woman. This was the first time he'd seen a corpse, and he was somewhat shaken by the ludicrously relaxed grotesqueness of the girl lying on her back on the rug, and his hand trembled a little as he made out his report. But when he came to the blank line calling for an identification of RACE, he unhesitatingly wrote "Negro."

The call had been taken at Headquarters by a patrolman in the central Complaint Bureau. He sat at a desk with a pad of printed forms before him, and he copied down the information, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, rolled the form and slipped it into a metal carrier, and then shot it by pneumatic tube to the radio room. A dispatcher there read the complaint form, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, studied the precinct map on the wall opposite his desk, and then dispatched car eleven of the 87th Precinct to the scene.

* * * *

The girl was dead.

She may have been a pretty girl, but she was hideous in death, distorted by the expanding gases inside her skin case. She was wearing a sweater and skirt, and she was barefoot, and her skirt had pulled back when she fell to the rug. Her head was twisted at a curious angle, the short black hair cradled by the rug, her eyes open and brown in a bloated face. The patrolman felt a sudden impulse to pull the girl's skirt down over her knees. He knew, suddenly, she would have wanted this. Death had caught her in this indecent posture, robbing her of female instinct. There were things this girl would never do again, so many things, all of which must have seemed enormously important to the girl herself. But the single universal thing was an infinitesimal detail, magnified now by death: she would never again perform the simple feminine and somehow beautiful act of pulling her skirt down over her knees.

The patrolman sighed and finished his report. The image of the

dead girl remained in his mind all the way down to the squad car.

* * * *

It was hot in the squadroom on that night in early August. The men working the graveyard shift had reported for duty at 6:00 p.m., and they would not go home until eight the following morning. They were all detectives and perhaps privileged members of the police force, but there were many policemen — Detective Meyer Meyer among them — who maintained that a uniformed cop's life made a hell of a lot more sense than a detective's.

"Sure, it does," Meyer insisted now, sitting at his desk in his shirt sleeves. "A patrolman's schedule provides regularity and security. It gives a man a home life."

"This squadroom is your home, Meyer," Carella said. "Admit it."

"Sure," Meyer answered, grinning. "I can't wait to come to work each day." He passed a hand over his bald pate. "You know what I like especially about this place? The interior decoration. The decor. It's very restful."

"Oh, you don't like your fellow workers, huh?" Carella said. He slid off the desk and winked at Cotton Hawes, who was standing at one of the filing cabinets. Then he walked toward the water cooler at the other end of the room, just inside the slatted railing that divided squadroom from corridor. He moved with a nonchalant ease that was deceptive. Steve Carella had never been one of those weight-lifting goons, and the image he presented was hardly one of bulging muscular power. But there was a quiet strength about the man and the way he moved, a confidence in the way he casually accepted the capabilities and limitations of his body. He stopped at the water cooler, filled a paper cup, and turned to look at Meyer again.

"No, I like my colleagues," Meyer said. "In fact, Steve, if I had my choice in all the world of who to work with, I would choose you honorable, decent guys. Sure." Meyer nodded, building steam. "In fact, I'm thinking of having some medals cast off, so I can hand them out to you guys. Boy, am I lucky to have this job! I may come to work without pay from now on. I may just refuse my salary, this job is so enriching. I want to thank you guys. You make me recognize the real values in life."

"He makes a nice speech," Hawes said.

"He should run the line-up. It would break the monotony. How come you don't run the line-up, Meyer?"

"Steve, I been offered the job," Meyer said seriously. "I told them I'm needed right here at the Eighty-seventh, the garden spot of all the precincts. Why, they offered me chief of detectives, and when I said no, they offered me commissioner, but I was loyal to the squad."

"Let's give *him* a medal," Hawes said, and the telephone rang.

Meyer lifted the receiver. "Eighty-seventh Squad. Detective Meyer. What? Yeah, just a second." He pulled a pad into place and began writing. "Yeah, I got it. Right. Right. Right. Okay." He hung up. Carella had walked to his desk. "A little colored girl," Meyer said.

"Yeah?"

"In a furnished room on South Eleventh."

"Yeah?"

"Dead," Meyer said.

* * * *

2

The city doesn't seem to be itself in the very early hours of the morning.

She is a woman, of course, and time will never change that. She awakes as a woman, tentatively touching the day in a yawning, smiling stretch, her lips free of color, her hair tousled, warm from sleep, her body richer, an innocent girlish quality about her as sunlight stains the eastern sky and covers her with early heat. She dresses in furnished rooms in crumby rundown slums, and she dresses in Hall Avenue penthouses, and in the countless apartments that crowd the buildings of Isola and Riverhead and Calm's Point, in the private houses that line the streets of Bethtown and Majesta, and she emerges a different woman, sleek and businesslike, attractive but not sexy, a look of utter competence about her, manicured and polished, but with no time for nonsense, there is a long working day ahead of her. At five o'clock a metamorphosis takes place. She does not change her costume, this city, this woman, she wears the same frock or the same suit, the same high-heeled pumps or the same suburban loafers, but something breaks through that immaculate shell, a mood, a tone, an undercurrent. She is a different woman who sits in the bars and cocktail lounges, who relaxes on the patios or on the terraces shelving the skyscrapers, a different woman with a somewhat lazily inviting grin, a somewhat tired expression, an impenetrable knowledge on her face and in her eyes: she lifts her glass, she laughs gently, the evening sits expectantly on the skyline, the sky is awash with the purple of day's end.

She turns female in the night.

She drops her femininity and turns female. The polish is gone, the mechanized competence; she becomes a little scatterbrained and a little cuddly; she crosses her legs recklessly and allows her lipstick to be kissed clear off her mouth, and she responds to the male hands on her body, and she turns soft and inviting and miraculously primitive. The night is a female time, and the city is nothing but a woman.

And in the empty hours she sleeps, and she does not seem to be herself.

In the morning she will awake again and touch the silent air in a yawn, spreading her arms, the contented smile on her naked mouth. Her hair will be mussed, we will know her, we have seen her this way often.

But now she sleeps. She sleeps silently, this city. Oh, an eye open in the buildings of the night here and there, winking on, off again, silence. She rests. In sleep we do not recognize her. Her sleep is not like death, for we can hear and sense the murmur of life beneath the warm bedclothes. But she is a strange woman whom we have known intimately, loved passionately, and now she curls into an unresponsive ball beneath the sheets, and our hand is on her rich hip. We can feel life there, but we do not know her. She is faceless and featureless in the dark. She could be any city, any woman, anywhere. We touch her uncertainly. She has pulled the black nightgown of early morning around her, and we do not know her. She is a stranger, and her eyes are closed.

The landlady was frightened by the presence of policemen, even though she had summoned them. The taller one, the one who called himself Detective Hawes, was a redheaded giant with a white streak in his hair, a horror if she'd ever seen one. The landlady stood in the apartment where the girl lay dead on the rug, and she talked to the detectives in whispers, not because she was in the presence of death, but only because it was three o'clock in the morning. The landlady was wearing a bathrobe over her gown. There was an intimacy to the scene, the same intimacy that hangs alike over an impending fishing trip or a completed tragedy. Three a.m. is a time for slumber, and those who are awake while the city sleeps share a common bond that makes them friendly aliens.

"What's the girl's name?" Carella asked. It was three o'clock in the morning, and he had not shaved since 5 p.m. the day before, but his chin looked smooth. His eyes slanted slightly downward, combining with his clean-shaven face to give him a curiously oriental appearance. The landlady liked him. He was a nice boy, she thought. In her lexicon the men of the world were either "nice boys" or "louses." She wasn't sure about Cotton Hawes yet, but she imagined he was a parasitic insect.

"Claudia Davis," she answered, directing the answer to Carella whom she liked, and totally ignoring Hawes who had no right to be so big a man with a frightening white streak in his hair.

“Do you know how old she was?” Carella asked.

“Twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I think.”

“Had she been living here long?”

“Since June,” the landlady said.

“That short a time, huh?”

“And *this* has to happen,” the landlady said. “She seemed like such a nice girl. Who do you suppose did it?”

“I don’t know,” Carella said.

“Or do you think it was suicide? I don’t smell no gas, do you?”

“No,” Carella said. “Do you know where she lived before this, Mrs. Mauder?”

“No, I don’t.”

“You didn’t ask for references when she took the apartment?”

“It’s only a furnished room,” Mrs. Mauder said, shrugging. “She paid me a month’s rent in advance.”

“How much was that, Mrs. Mauder?”

“Sixty dollars. She paid it in cash. I never take checks from strangers.”

“But you have no idea whether she’s from this city, or out of town, or whatever. Am I right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Davis,” Hawes said, shaking his head.

“That’ll be a tough name to track down, Steve. Must be a thousand of them in the phone book.”

“Why is your hair white?” the landlady asked.

“Huh?”

“That streak.”

“Oh.” Hawes unconsciously touched his left temple. “I got knifed once,” he said, dismissing the question abruptly. “Mrs. Mauder, was the girl living alone?”

“I don’t know. I mind my own business.”

“Well, surely you would have seen...”

“I think she was living alone. I don’t pry, and I don’t spy. She gave me a month’s rent in advance.”

Hawes sighed. He could feel the woman’s hostility. He decided to leave the questioning to Carella. “I’ll take a look through the drawers and closets,” he said, and moved off without waiting for Carella’s answer.

“It’s awfully hot in here,” Carella said.

“The patrolman said we shouldn’t touch anything until you got here,” Mrs. Mauder said. “That’s why I didn’t open the windows or nothing.”

“That was very thoughtful of you,” Carella said, smiling. “But I think we can open the window now, don’t you?”

“If you like. It does smell in here. Is . . . is that her? Smelling?”

“Yes,” Carella answered. He pulled open the window. “There. That’s a little better.”

“Doesn’t help much,” the landlady said. “The weather’s been terrible — just terrible. Body can’t sleep at all.” She looked down at the dead girl. “She looks just awful, don’t she?”

“Yes. Mrs. Mauder, would you know where she worked, or if she had a job?”

“No, I’m sorry.”

“Anyone ever come by asking for her? Friends? Relatives?”

“No, I’m sorry. I never saw any.”

“Can you tell me anything about her habits? When she left the house in the morning? When she returned at night?”

“I’m sorry; I never noticed.”

“Well, what made you think something was wrong in here?”

“The milk. Outside the door. I was out with some friends tonight, you see, and when I came back a man on the third floor called down to say his neighbor was playing the radio very loud and would I tell him to shut up, please. So I went upstairs and asked him to turn down the radio, and then I passed Miss Davis’ apartment and saw the milk standing outside the door, and I thought this was kind of funny in such hot weather, but I figured it was *her* milk, you know, and I don’t like to pry. So I came down and went to bed, but I couldn’t stop thinking about that milk standing outside in the hallway. So I put on a robe and came upstairs and knocked on the door, and she didn’t answer. So I called out to her, and she still didn’t answer. So I figured something must be wrong. I don’t know why. I just figured . . . I don’t know. If she was in here, why didn’t she answer?”

“How’d you know she was here?”

“I didn’t.”

“Was the door locked?”

“Yes.”

“You tried it?”

“Yes. It was locked.”

“I see,” Carella said.

“Couple of cars just pulled up downstairs,” Hawes said, walking over. “Probably the lab. And Homicide South.”

“They know the squeal is ours,” Carella said. “Why do they bother?”

“Make it look good,” Hawes said. “Homicide’s got the title on the door, so they figure they ought to go out and earn their salaries.”

“Did you find anything?”

“A brand-new set of luggage in the closet, six pieces. The drawers and closets are full of clothes. Most of them look new. Lots of resort stuff, Steve. Found some brand-new books, too.”

“What else?”

“Some mail on the dresser top.”

“Anything we can use?”

Hawes shrugged. “A statement from the girl’s bank. Bunch of canceled checks. Might help us.”

“Maybe,” Carella said. “Let’s see what the lab comes up with.”

The laboratory report came the next day, together with a necropsy report from the assistant medical examiner. In combination, the reports were fairly valuable. The first thing the detectives learned was that the girl was a white Caucasian of approximately thirty years of age.

Yes, white.

The news came as something of a surprise to the cops because the girl lying on the rug had certainly looked like a Negress. After all, her skin was black. Not tan, not coffee-colored, not brown, but black — that intensely black coloration found on primitive tribes who spend a good deal of their time in the sun. The conclusion seemed to be a logical one, but death is a great equalizer not without a whimsical humor all its own, and the funniest kind of joke is a sight gag. Death changes white to black, and when that grisly old man comes marching in there’s no question of who’s going to school with whom. There’s no longer any question of pigmentation, friend. That girl on the floor looked black, but she was white, and whatever else she was she was also stone cold dead, and that’s the worst you can do to anybody.

The report explained that the girl’s body was in a state of advanced putrefaction, and it went into such esoteric terms as “general distention of the body cavities, tissues, and blood vessels with gas,”

and “black discoloration of the skin, mucous membranes, and irides caused by hemolysis and action of hydrogen sulfide on the blood pigment,” all of which broke down to the simple fact that it was a damn hot week in August and the girl had been lying on a rug which retained heat and speeded the postmortem putrefaction. From what they could tell, and in weather like this, it was mostly a guess, the girl had been dead and decomposing for at least forty-eight hours, which set the time of her demise as August first or thereabouts.

One of the reports went on to say that the clothes she’d been wearing had been purchased in one of the city’s larger department stores. All of her clothes — those she wore and those found in her apartment — were rather expensive, but someone at the lab thought it necessary to note that all her panties were trimmed with Belgian lace and retailed for twenty-five dollars a pair. Someone else at the lab mentioned that a thorough examination of her garments and her body had revealed no traces of blood, semen, or oil stains.

The coroner fixed the cause of death as strangulation.

* * * *

It is amazing how much an apartment can sometimes yield to science. It is equally amazing, and more than a little disappointing, to get nothing from the scene of a murder when you are desperately seeking a clue. The furnished room in which Claudia Davis had been strangled to death was full of juicy surfaces conceivably carrying hundreds of latent fingerprints. The closets and drawers contained piles of clothing that might have carried traces of anything from gunpowder to face powder.

But the lab boys went around lifting their prints and sifting their dust and vacuuming with a Söderman-Heuberger filter, and they went down to the morgue and studied the girl's skin and came up with a total of nothing. Zero. Oh, not quite zero. They got a lot of prints belonging to Claudia Davis, and a lot of dust collected from all over the city and clinging to her shoes and her furniture. They also found some documents belonging to the dead girl — a birth certificate, a diploma of graduation from a high school in Santa Monica, and an expired library card. And, oh, yes, a key. The key didn't seem to fit any of the locks in the room. They sent all the junk over to the 87th, and Sam Grossman called Carella personally later that day to apologize for the lack of results.

The squadroom was hot and noisy when Carella took the call from the lab. The conversation was a curiously one-sided affair. Carella, who had dumped the contents of the laboratory envelope onto his desk, merely grunted or nodded every now and then. He thanked Grossman at last, hung up, and stared at the window facing the street and Grover Park.

"Get anything?" Meyer asked.

"Yeah. Grossman thinks the killer was wearing gloves."

"That's nice," Meyer said.

"Also, I think I know what this key is for." He lifted it from the desk.

"Yeah? What?"

“Well, did you see these canceled checks?”

“No.”

“Take a look,” Carella said.

He opened the brown bank envelope addressed to Claudia Davis, spread the canceled checks on his desk top, and then unfolded the yellow bank statement. Meyer studied the display silently.

“Cotton found the envelope in her room,” Carella said. “The statement covers the month of July. Those are all the checks she wrote, or at least everything that cleared the bank by the thirty-first.”

“Lots of checks here,” Meyer said.

“Twenty-five, to be exact. What do you think?”

“I know what I think,” Carella said.

“What’s that?”

“I look at those checks. I can see a life. It’s like reading somebody’s diary. Everything she did last month is right here, Meyer. All the department stores she went to, look, a florist, her hairdresser, a candy shop, even her shoemaker, and look at this. A check made out to a funeral home. Now who died, Meyer, huh? And look here. She was living at Mrs. Mauder’s place, but here’s a check made out to a swank apartment building on the South Side, in Stewart City. And some of these checks are just made out to names, *people*. This case is crying for some people.”

“You want me to get the phone book?”

“No, wait a minute. Look at this bank statement. She opened the account on July fifth with a thousand bucks. All of a sudden, bam, she deposits a thousand bucks in the Seaboard Bank of America.”

“What’s so odd about that?”

“Nothing, maybe. But Cotton called the other banks in the city, and Claudia Davis has a very healthy account at the Highland Trust on Cromwell Avenue. And I mean *very* healthy.”

“How healthy?”

“Close to sixty grand.”

“What!”

“You heard me. And the Highland Trust lists no withdrawals for the month of July. So where’d she get the money to put into Seaboard?”

“Was that the only deposit?”

“Take a look.”

Meyer picked up the statement.

“The initial deposit was on July fifth,” Carella said. “A thousand bucks. She made another thousand-dollar deposit on July twelfth. And another on the nineteenth. And another on the twenty-seventh.”

Meyer raised his eyebrows. “Four grand. That’s a lot of loot.”

“And all deposited in less than a month’s time. I’ve got to work almost a full year to make that kind of money.”

“Not to mention the sixty grand in the other bank. Where do you suppose she got it, Steve?”

“I don’t know. It just doesn’t make sense. She wears underpants trimmed with Belgian lace, but she lives in a crummy room-and-a-half with bath. How the hell do you figure that? Two bank accounts, twenty-five bucks to cover her ass, and all she pays is sixty bucks a month for a flophouse.”

“Maybe she’s hot, Steve.”

“No.” Carella shook his head. “I ran a make with C.B.I. She hasn’t got a record, and she’s not wanted for anything. I haven’t heard from the feds yet, but I imagine it’ll be the same story.”

“What about that key? You said . . .”

“Oh, yeah. That’s pretty simple, thank God. Look at this.”

“Let’s get the court order *before* we go to the bank.”

* * * *

The manager of the Seaboard Bank of America was a bald-headed man in his early fifties. Working on the theory that similar physical types are *simpático*, Carella allowed Meyer to do most of the questioning. It was not easy to elicit answers from Mr. Anderson., the manager of the bank, because he was by nature a reticent man. But Detective Meyer Meyer was the most patient man in the city, if not the entire world. His patience was an acquired trait, rather than an inherited one. Oh, he had inherited a few things from his father, a jovial man named Max Meyer, but patience was not one of them. If anything, Max Meyer had been a very impatient if not downright short-tempered sort of fellow. When his wife, for example, came to him with the news that she was expecting a baby, Max nearly hit the ceiling. He enjoyed little jokes immensely, was perhaps the biggest practical joker in all Riverhead, but this particular prank of nature failed to amuse him. He had thought his wife was long past the age when bearing children was even a remote possibility. He never thought of himself as approaching dotage, but he was after all getting on in years, and a change-of-life baby was hardly what the doctor had ordered. He allowed the impending birth to simmer inside him, planning his revenge all the while, plotting the practical joke to end all practical jokes.

When the baby was born, he named it Meyer, a delightful handle which when coupled with the family name provided the infant with a double-barreled monicker: Meyer Meyer.

Now that's pretty funny. Admit it. You can split your sides laughing over that one, unless you happen to be a pretty sensitive kid who also happens to be an Orthodox Jew, and who happens to live in a predominately Gentile neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood thought Meyer Meyer had been invented solely for their own pleasure. If they needed further provocation for beating up the Jew boy, and they didn't need any, his name provided excellent motivational fuel. "Meyer Meyer, Jew on fire!" they would shout, and then they would chase him down the street and beat hell out of him.

Meyer learned patience. It is not very often that one kid, or even one grown man, can successfully defend himself against a gang. But sometimes you can talk yourself out of a beating. Sometimes, if you're patient, if you just wait long enough, you can catch one of them

alone and stand up to him face to face, man to man, and know the exultation of a fair fight without the frustration of overwhelming odds.

Listen, Max Meyer's joke was a harmless one. You can't deny an old man his pleasure. But Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, was fifty-four years old and totally bald. Meyer Meyer, the detective second grade who sat opposite him and asked questions, was also totally bald. Maybe a lifetime of sublimation, a lifetime of devoted patience, doesn't leave any scars. Maybe not. But Meyer Meyer was only thirty-seven years old.

Patiently he said, "Didn't you find these large deposits rather odd, Mr. Anderson?"

"No," Anderson said. "A thousand dollars is not a lot of money."

"Mr. Anderson," Meyer said patiently, "you are aware, of course, that banks in this city are required to report to the police any unusually large sums of money deposited at one time. You are aware of that, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Miss Davis deposited four thousand dollars in three weeks' time. Didn't that seem unusual to you?"

"No. The deposits were spaced. A thousand dollars is not a lot of money, and not an unusually large deposit."

"To me," Meyer said, "a thousand dollars is a lot of money. You can buy a lot of beer with a thousand dollars."

"I don't drink beer," Anderson said flatly.

"Neither do I," Meyer answered.

"Besides, we *do* call the police whenever we get a very large deposit, unless the depositor is one of our regular customers. I did not feel that these deposits warranted such a call."

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson," Meyer said. "We have a court order here. We'd like to open the box Miss Davis rented."

"May I see the order, please?" Anderson said. Meyer showed it

to him. Anderson sighed and said, "Very well. Do you have Miss Davis' key?"

Carella reached into his pocket. "Would this be it?" he said. He put a key on the desk. It was the key that had come to him from the lab together with the documents they'd found in the apartment.

"Yes, that's it," Mr. Anderson said. "There are two different keys to every box, you see. The bank keeps one, and the renter keeps the other. The box cannot be opened without both keys. Will you come with me, please?"

He collected the bank key to safety-deposit box number 375 and led the detectives to the rear of the bank. The room seemed to be lined with shining metal. The boxes, row upon row, reminded Carella of the morgue and the refrigerated shelves that slid in and out of the wall on squeaking rollers. Anderson pushed the bank key into a slot and turned it, and then he put Claudia Davis' key into a second slot and turned that. He pulled the long, thin box out of the wall and handed it to Meyer. Meyer carried it to the counter on the opposite wall and lifted the catch.

"Okay?" he said to Carella.

"Go ahead."

Meyer raised the lid of the box.

There was \$16,000 in the box. There was also a slip of note paper. The \$16,000 was neatly divided into four stacks of bills. Three of the stacks held \$5,000 each. The fourth stack held only \$1,000. Carella picked up the slip of paper. Someone, presumably Claudia Davis., had made some annotations on it in pencil.

7/5	20,000
7/5	<u>-1,000</u>
	19,000
7/12	<u>-1,000</u>
	18,000
7/19	<u>-1,000</u>
	17,000
7/27	<u>-1,000</u>
	16,000

“Make any sense to you, Mr. Anderson?”

“No, I’m afraid not.”

“She came into this bank on July fifth with twenty thousand dollars in cash, Mr. Anderson. She put a thousand of that into a checking account and the remainder into this box. The dates on this slip of paper show exactly when she took cash from the box and transferred it to the checking account. She knew the rules, Mr. Anderson. She knew that twenty grand deposited in one lump would bring a call to the police. This way was a lot safer.”

“We’d better get a list of these serial numbers,’ Meyer said.

“Would you have one of your people do that for us, Mr. Anderson?”

Anderson seemed ready to protest. Instead, he looked at Carella, sighed, and said, "Of course."

The serial numbers didn't help them at all. They compared them against their own lists, and the out-of-town lists, and the FBI lists, but none of those bills was hot.

Only August was.

* * * *

Stewart City hangs in the hair of Isola like a jeweled tiara. Not really a city, not even a town, merely a collection of swank apartment buildings overlooking the River Dix, the community had been named after British royalty and remained one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in town. If you could boast of a Stewart City address, you could also boast of a high income, a country place on Sands Spit, and a Mercedes Benz in the garage under the apartment building. You could give your address with a measure of snobbery and pride — you were, after all, one of the elite.

The dead girl named Claudia Davis had made out a check to Management Enterprise, Inc., at 13 Stewart Place South, to the tune of \$750. The check had been dated July nine, four days after she'd opened the Seaboard account.

A cool breeze was blowing in off the river as Carella and Hawes pulled up. Late-afternoon sunlight dappled the polluted water of the Dix. The bridges connecting Calm's Point with Isola hung against a sky awaiting the assault of dusk.

"Want to pull down the sun visor?" Carella said.

Hawes reached up and turned down the visor. Clipped to the visor so that it showed through the windshield of the car was a hand-lettered card that read POLICEMAN ON DUTY CALL — 87TH PRECINCT. The car, a 1956 Chevrolet, was Carella's own.

"I've got to make a sign for my car," Hawes said. "Some bastard tagged it last week."

"What did you do?"

"I went to court and pleaded not guilty. On my day off."

"Did you get out of it?"

"Sure. I was answering a squeal. It's bad enough I had to use my own car, but for Pete's sake, to get a ticket!"

"I prefer my own car," Carella said. "Those three cars belonging to the squad are ready for the junk heap."

"Two" Hawes corrected. "One of them's been in the police garage for a month now."

"Meyer went down to see about it the other day."

"What'd they say? Was it ready?"

"No, the mechanic told him there were four patrol cars ahead of the sedan, and they took precedence. Now how about that?"

"Sure, it figures. I've still got a chit in for the gas I used, you know that?"

"Forget it. I've never got back a cent I laid out for gas."

"What'd Meyer do about the car?"

"He slipped the mechanic five bucks. Maybe that'll speed him up."

"You know what the city ought to do?" Hawes said. "They ought to buy some of those used taxicabs. Pick them up for two or three hundred bucks, paint them over, and give them out to the squads. Some of them are still in pretty good condition."

"Well, it's an idea," Carella said dubiously, and they entered the building. They found Mrs. Miller, the manager, in an office at the rear of the ornate entrance lobby. She was a woman in her early forties with a well-preserved figure and a very husky voice. She wore her hair piled on the top of her head, a pencil stuck rakishly into the reddish-brown heap. She looked at the photostated check and said, "Oh, yes, of course."

"You knew Miss Davis?"

"Yes, she lived here for a long time."

"How long?"

"Five years."

“When did she move out?”

“At the end of June.” Mrs. Miller crossed her splendid legs and smiled graciously. The legs were remarkable for a woman of her age, and the smile was almost radiant. She moved with an expert femininity, a calculated, conscious fluidity of flesh that suggested availability and yet was totally respectable. She seemed to have devoted a lifetime to learning the ways and wiles of the female and now practiced them with facility and charm. She was pleasant to be with, this woman, pleasant to watch and to hear, and to think of touching. Carella and Hawes, charmed to their shoes, found themselves relaxing in her presence.

“This check,” Carella said, tapping the photostat. “What was it for?”

“June’s rent. I received it on the tenth of July. Claudia always paid her rent by the tenth of the month. She was a very good tenant.”

“The apartment cost seven hundred and fifty dollars a month?”

“Yes.”

“Isn’t that high for an apartment?”

“Not in Stewart City,” Mrs. Miller said gently. “And this was a river-front apartment.”

“I see. I take it Miss Davis had a good job.”

“No, no, she doesn’t have a job at all.”

“Then how could she afford . . . ?”

“Well, she’s rather well off, you know.”

“Where does she get the money, Mrs. Miller?”

“Well . . .” Mrs. Miller shrugged. “I really think you should ask *her*, don’t you? I mean, if this is something concerning Claudia, shouldn’t you . . . ?”

“Mrs. Miller,” Carella said, “Claudia Davis is dead.”

“What?”

“She’s . . .”

“What? No. No.” She shook her head. “Claudia? But the check ... I ... the check came only last month.” She shook her head again. “No. No.”

“She’s dead, Mrs. Miller,” Carella said gently. “She was strangled.”

The charm faltered for just an instant. Revulsion knifed the eyes of Mrs. Miller, the eyelids flickered, it seemed for an instant that the pupils would turn shining and wet, that the carefully lipsticked mouth would crumble. And then something inside took over, something that demanded control, something that reminded her that a charming woman does not weep and cause her fashionable eye make-up to run.

“I’m sorry,” she said, almost in a whisper. “I am really, really sorry. She was a nice person.”

“Can you tell us what you know about her, Mrs. Miller?”

“Yes. Yes, of course.” She shook her head again, unwilling to accept the idea. “That’s terrible. That’s terrible. Why, she was only a baby.”

“We figured her for thirty, Mrs. Miller. Are we wrong?”

“She seemed younger, but perhaps that was because . . . well, she was a rather shy person. Even when she first came here, there was an air of — well, lostness about her. Of course, that was right after her parents died, so . . .”

“Where did she come from, Mrs. Miller?”

“California. Santa Monica.”

Carella nodded. “You were starting to tell us ... you said she was rather well off. Could you ... ?”

“Well, the stock, you know.”

“What stock?”

"Her parents had set up a securities trust account for her. When they died, Claudia began receiving the income from the stock. She was an only child, you know."

"And she lived on stock dividends alone?"

"They amounted to quite a bit. Which she saved, I might add. She was a very systematic person, not at all frivolous. When she received a dividend check, she would endorse it and take it straight to the bank. Claudia was a very sensible girl."

"Which bank, Mrs. Miller?"

"The Highland Trust. Right down the street. On Cromwell Avenue."

"I see," Carella said. "Was she dating many men? Would you know?"

"I don't think so. She kept pretty much to herself. Even after Josie came."

Carella leaned forward. "Josie? Who's Josie?"

"Josie Thompson. Josephine, actually. Her cousin."

"And where did *she* come from?"

"California. They both came from California."

"And how can we get in touch with this Josie Thompson?"

"Well, she . . . Don't you know? Haven't you ... ?"

"What, Mrs. Miller?"

"Why, Josie is dead. Josie passed on in June. That's why Claudia moved, I suppose. I suppose she couldn't bear the thought of living in that apartment without Josie. It *is* a little frightening, isn't it?"

"Yes," Carella said.

DETECTIVE DIVISION SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT	SQUAD	PRECINCT	PRECINCT REPORT	DETECTIVE DIVISION REPORT NUMBER
pdcn 360 rev 25m	87	87	32-101	DD 60 R-42
NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON REPORTING			DATE ORIGINAL REORT	
<u>Miller Irene (Mrs. John)</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>Stewart Place S.</u>	<u>8-4-60</u>	
SURNAME GIVEN NAME	INITIALS	NUMBER	STREET	

DETAILS

Summary of interview with Irene (Mrs. John) Miller at office of Management Enterprises, Inc., address above, in re homicide Claudia Davis. Mrs. Miller states:

Claudia Davis came to this city in June of 1955, took \$750-a-month apartment above address, lived there alone. Rarely seen in company of friends, male or female. Young recluse type living on substantial income of inherited securities. Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carter Davis, killed on San Diego Freeway in head-on collision with station wagon, April 14, 1955.

L.A.P.D. confirms traffic accident, driver of other vehicle convicted for negligent operation. Mrs. Miller describes girl as medium height and weight, closed-cropped brunette hair, brown eyes, no scars or birthmarks she can remember, tallies with what we have on corpse. Further says Claudia Davis was quiet, unobtrusive tenant, paid rent and all service bills punctually, was gentle, sweet, plain, childlike, shy, meticulous in money matters, well liked but unapproachable.

In April or May of 1959, Josie Thompson, cousin of deceased, arrived from Brentwood, California. (Routine check with Criminal Bureau Identification negative, no record. Checking now with L.A.P.D. and FBI.) Described as slightly older than Claudia, rather different in looks and personality. "They were like black and white," Mrs. Miller says, "but they hit it off exceptionally well." Josie moved into the apartment with cousin. Words used to describe relationship between two were "like the closest sisters," and "really in tune," and "the best of friends," etc. Girls did not date much, were constantly in each other's company, Josie seeming to pick up recluse habits from Claudia. Went on frequent trips together. Spent summer of '59 on Tortoise Island in the bay, returned Labor Day. Went away again at Christmas time to ski Sun Valley, and again in March this year to Kingston, Jamaica, for three weeks, returning at beginning of April. Source of income was fairly standard securities-income account. Claudia did not own the stock, but income on it was hers for as long as she lived. Trust specified that upon her death the stock and the income be turned over to U.C.L.A. (father's alma mater). In any case, Claudia was assured of a very, very substantial lifetime income (see Highland Trust bank account) and was apparently supporting Josie as well, since Mrs. Miller claims neither girl worked. Brought up question of possible lesbianism, but Mrs. Miller, who is knowledgeable and hip, says no, neither girl was a dike.

On June 3, Josie and Claudia left for another weekend trip. Doorman reports having helped them pack valises into trunk of Claudia's car, 1960 Cadillac convertible. Claudia did the driving. Girls did not return on Monday morning as they had indicated they would. Claudia called on Wednesday, crying on telephone. Told Mrs. Miller that Josie had had a terrible accident and was dead. Mrs. Miller remembers asking Claudia if

she could help in any way. Claudia said, quote, No, everything's been taken care of already, unquote.

On June 17, Mrs. Miller received a letter from Claudia (letter attached — handwriting compares positive with checks Claudia signed) stating she could not possibly return to apartment, not after what had happened to her cousin. She reminded Mrs. Miller lease expired on July 4, told her she would send check for June's rent before July 10. Said moving company would pack and pick up her belongings, delivering all valuables and documents to her, and storing rest. (See Claudia Davis' check number 010, 7/14, made payable to Allora Brothers, Inc., "in payment for packing, moving, and storage.") Claudia Davis never returned to the apartment. Mrs. Miller had not seen her and knew nothing of her whereabouts until we informed her of the homicide.

DATE OF THIS REPORT

August 6

Det 2/gr Carella	S.L.	714-50-32	Det/Lt. Peter Byrnes
RANK	SURNAME	SHIELD NUMBER	COMMANDING OFFICER

* * * *

The drive upstate to Triangle Lake was a particularly scenic one, and since it was August, and since Sunday was supposed to be Carella's day off, he thought he might just as well combine a little business with pleasure. So he put the top of the car down, and he packed Teddy into the front seat together with a picnic lunch and a gallon Thermos of iced coffee, and he forgot all about Claudia Davis on the drive up through the mountains. Carella found it easy to forget about almost anything when he was with his wife.

Teddy, as far as he was concerned — and his astute judgment had been backed up by many a street-corner whistle — was only the most beautiful woman in the world. He could never understand how he, a hairy, corny, ugly, stupid, clumsy cop, had managed to capture anyone as wonderful as Theodora Franklin. But capture her he had, and he sat beside her now in the open car and stole sidelong glances at her as he drove, excited as always by her very presence.

Her black hair, always wild, seemed to capture something of the wind's frenzy as it whipped about the oval of her face. Her brown eyes were partially squinted against the rush of air over the windshield. She wore a white blouse emphatically curved over a full bosom, black tapered slacks form-fitted over generous hips and good legs. She had kicked off her sandals and folded her knees against her breasts, her bare feet pressed against the glove-compartment panel. There was about her, Carella realized, a curious combination of savage and sophisticate. You never knew whether she was going to kiss you or slug you, and the uncertainty kept her eternally desirable and exciting.

Teddy watched her husband as he drove, his big-knuckled hands on the wheel of the car. She watched him not only because it gave her pleasure to watch him, but also because he was speaking. And since she could not hear, since she had been born a deaf mute, it was essential that she look at his mouth when he spoke. He did not discuss the case at all. She knew that one of Claudia Davis' checks had been made out to the Fancher Funeral Home in Triangle Lake and she knew that Carella wanted to talk to the proprietor of the place personally. She further knew that this was very important or he wouldn't be spending his Sunday driving all the way upstate. But he had promised her he'd combine business with pleasure. This was the

pleasure part of the trip, and in deference to his promise and his wife, he refrained from discussing the case, which was really foremost in his mind. He talked, instead, about the scenery, and their plans for the fall, and the way the twins were growing, and how pretty Teddy looked, and how she'd better button that top button of her blouse before they got out of the car, but he never once mentioned Claudia Davis until they were standing in the office of the Fancher Funeral Home and looking into the gloomy eyes of a man who called himself Barton Scoles.

Scoles was tall and thin and he wore a black suit that he had probably worn to his own confirmation back in 1912. He was so much the stereotype of a small-town undertaker that Carella almost burst out laughing when he met him. Somehow, though, the environment was not conducive to hilarity. There was a strange smell hovering over the thick rugs and the papered walls and the hanging chandeliers. It was a while before Carella recognized it as formaldehyde and then made the automatic association and, curious for a man who had stared into the eyes of death so often, suddenly felt like retching.

"Miss Davis made out a check to you on July fifteenth," Carella said. "Can you tell me what it was for?"

"Sure can," Scoles said. "Had to wait a long time for that check. She give me only a twenty-five dollar deposit. Usually take fifty, you know. I got stuck many a time, believe me."

"How do you mean?" Carella asked.

"People. You bury their dead, and then sometimes they don't pay you for your work. This business isn't *all* fun, you know. Many's the time I handled the whole funeral and the service and the burial and all, and never did get paid. Makes you lose your faith in human nature."

"But Miss Davis finally *did* pay you."

"Oh, sure. But I can tell you I was sweating that one out. I can tell you that. After all, she was a strange gal from the city, has the funeral here, nobody comes to it but her, sitting in the chapel out there and watching the body as if someone's going to steal it away, just her and the departed. I tell you, Mr. Carella ... Is that your name?"

"Yes, Carella."

"I tell you, it was kind of spooky. Lay there two days, she did, her cousin. And then Miss Davis asked that we bury the girl right here in the local cemetery, so I done that for her, too — all on the strength of a twenty-five-dollar deposit. That's trust, Mr. Carella, with a capital T."

"When was this, Mr. Scoles?"

"The girl drowned the first weekend in June," Scoles said. "Had no business being out on the lake so early, anyways. That water's still icy cold in June. Don't really warm up none till the latter part July. She fell over the side of the boat — she was out there rowing, you know — and that icy water probably froze her solid, or give her cramps or something, drowned her, anyways." Scoles shook his head. "Had no business being out on the lake so early."

"Did you see a death certificate?"

"Yep, Dr. Donneli made it out. Cause of death was drowning, all right, no question about it. We had an inquest, too, you know. The Tuesday after she drowned. They said it was accidental."

"You said she was out rowing in a boat. Alone?"

"Yep. Her cousin, Miss Davis, was on the shore watching. Jumped in when she fell overboard, tried to reach her, but couldn't make it in time. That water's plenty cold, believe me. Ain't too warm even now, and here it is August already."

"But it didn't seem to affect Miss Davis, did it?"

"Well, she was probably a strong swimmer. Been my experience most pretty girls are strong girls, too. I'll bet your wife here is a strong girl. She sure is a pretty one."

Scoles smiled, and Teddy smiled, and squeezed Carella's hand.

"About the payment," Carella said, "for the funeral and the burial. Do you have any idea why it took Miss Davis so long to send her check?"

"Nope. I wrote her twice. First time was just a friendly little reminder. Second time, I made it a little stronger. Attorney friend of

mine in town wrote it on his stationery; that always impresses them. Didn't get an answer either time. Finally, right out of the blue, the check came, payment in full. Beats me. Maybe she was affected by the death. Or maybe she's always slow paying her debts. I'm just happy the check came, that's all. Sometimes the live ones can give you more trouble than them who's dead, believe me."

They strolled down to the lake together, Carella and his wife, and ate their picnic lunch on its shores. Carella was strangely silent. Teddy dangled her bare feet in the water. The water, as Scoles had promised, was very cold even though it was August. On the way back from the lake Carella asked, "Honey, would you mind if I make one more stop?"

Teddy turned her eyes to him inquisitively.

"I want to see the chief of police here."

Teddy frowned. The question was in her eyes, and he answered it immediately.

"To find out whether or not there were any witnesses to that drowning. *Besides* Claudia Davis, I mean. From the way Scoles was talking, I get the impression that lake was pretty deserted in June."

* * * *

The chief of police was a short man with a pot belly and big feet. He kept his feet propped up on his desk all the while he spoke to Carella. Carella watched him and wondered why everybody in this damned town seemed to be on vacation from an MGM movie. A row of rifles in a locked rack was behind the chief's desk. A host of WANTED fliers covered a bulletin board to the right of the rack. The chief had a hole in the sole of his left shoe.

"Yep," he said, "there was a witness, all right."

Carella felt a pang of disappointment. "Who?" he asked.

"Fellow fishing at the lake. Saw the whole thing. Testified before the coroner's jury."

"What'd he say?"

"Said he was fishing there when Josie Thompson took the boat out. Said Claudia Davis stayed behind, on the shore. Said Miss Thompson fell overboard and went under like a stone. Said Miss Davis jumped in the water and began swimming toward her. Didn't make it in time. That's what he said."

"What else did he say?"

"Well, he drove Miss Davis back to town in her car. 1960 Caddy convertible, I believe. She could hardly speak. She was sobbing and mumbling and wringing her hands, oh, in a hell of a mess. Why, we had to get the whole story out of that fishing fellow. Wasn't until the next day that Miss Davis could make any kind of sense."

"When did you hold the inquest?"

"Tuesday. Day before they buried the cousin. Coroner did the dissection on Monday. We got authorization from Miss Davis, Penal Law 2213, next of kin being charged by law with the duty of burial may authorize dissection for the sole purpose of ascertaining the cause of death."

"And the coroner reported the cause of death as drowning?"

"That's right. Said so right before the jury."

"Why'd you have an inquest? Did you suspect something more than accidental drowning?"

"Not necessarily. But that fellow who was fishing, well, *he* was from the city, too, you know. And for all we knew, him and Miss Davis could have been in this together, you know, shoved the cousin over the side of the boat, and then faked up a whole story, you know. They both coulda been lying in their teeth."

"Were they?"

"Not so we could tell. You never seen anybody so grief-stricken as Miss Davis was when the fishing fellow drove her into town. Girl would have to be a hell of an actress to behave that way. Calmed down the next day, but you shoulda seen her when it happened. And at the inquest it was plain this fishing fellow had never met her before that day at the lake. Convinced the jury he had no prior knowledge of or connection with either of the two girls. Convinced me, too, for that

matter.”

“What’s his name?” Carella asked. “This fishing fellow.”

“Courtenoy.”

“What did you say?”

“Courtenoy. Sidney Courtenoy.”

“Thanks,” Carella answered, and he rose suddenly. “Come on, Teddy. I want to get back to the city.”

Courtenoy lived in a one-family clapboard house in Riverhead. He was rolling up the door of his garage when Carella and Meyer pulled into his driveway early Monday morning. He turned to look at the car curiously, one hand on the rising garage door. The door stopped, halfway up, halfway down. Carella stepped into the driveway.

“Mr. Courtenoy?” he asked.

“Yes?” He stared at Carella, puzzlement on his face, the puzzlement that is always there when a perfect stranger addresses you by name. Courtenoy was a man in his late forties, wearing a cap and a badly fitted sports jacket and dark flannel slacks in the month of August. His hair was graying at the temples. He looked tired, very tired, and his weariness had nothing whatever to do with the fact that it was only seven o’clock in the morning. A lunch box was at his feet where he had apparently put it when he began rolling up the garage door. The car in the garage was a 1953 Ford.

“We’re police officers,” Carella said. “Mind if we ask you a few questions?”

“I’d like to see your badge,” Courtenoy said. Carella showed it to him. Courtenoy nodded as if he had performed a precautionary public duty. “What are your questions?” he said. “I’m on my way to work. Is this about that damn building permit again?”

“What building permit?”

“For extending the garage. I’m buying my son a little jalopy, don’t want to leave it out on the street. Been having a hell of a time getting a building permit. Can you imagine that? All I want to do is add

another twelve feet to the garage. You'd think I was trying to build a city park or something. Is that what this is about?"

From inside the house a woman's voice called, "Who is it, Sid?"

"Nothing, nothing," Courtenoy said impatiently. "Nobody. Never mind, Bett." He looked at Carella. "My wife. You married?"

"Yes, sir, I'm married," Carella said.

"Then you know," Courtenoy said cryptically. "What are your questions?"

"Ever see this before?" Carella asked. He handed a photostated copy of the check to Courtenoy, who looked at it briefly and handed it back.

"Sure."

"Want to explain it, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Explain what?"

"Explain why Claudia Davis sent you a check for a hundred and twenty dollars."

"As recompense," Courtenoy said unhesitatingly.

"Oh, recompense, huh?" Meyer said. "For what, Mr. Courtenoy? For a little cock-and-bull story?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Recompense for *what*, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"For missing three days' work, what the hell did you think?"

"How's that again?"

"No, what did you *think*?" Courtenoy said angrily, waving his finger at Meyer. "What did you think it was for? Some kind of payoff or something? Is that what you thought?"

"Mr. Courtenoy . . ."

"I lost three days' work because of that damn inquest. I had to stay up at Triangle Lake all day Monday and Tuesday and then again on Wednesday waiting for the jury decision. I'm a bricklayer. I get five bucks an hour and I lost three days' work, eight hours a day, and so Miss Davis was good enough to send me a check for a hundred and twenty bucks. Now just what the hell did you think, would you mind telling me?"

"Did you know Miss Davis before the day at Triangle Lake, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Never saw her before in my life. What is this? Am I on trial here? What is this?"

From inside the house the woman's voice came again, sharply, "Sidney! Is something wrong? Are you all right?"

"Nothing's wrong. Shut up, will you?"

There was an aggrieved silence from within the clapboard structure. Courtenoy muttered something under his breath and then turned to face the detectives again. "You finished?" he said.

"Not quite, Mr. Courtenoy. We'd like you to tell us what you saw that day at the lake."

"What the hell for? Go read the minutes of the inquest if you're so damn interested. I've got to get to work."

"That can wait, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Like hell it can. This job is away over in . . ."

"Mr. Courtenoy, we don't want to have to go all the way downtown and come back with a warrant for your arrest."

"My *arrest!* For what? Listen, what did I..."

"Sidney? Sidney, shall I call the police?" the woman shouted from inside the house.

"Oh, shut the hell up!" Courtenoy answered. "Call the police," he mumbled. "I'm up to my ears in cops, and she wants to call the

police. What do you want from me? I'm an honest bricklayer. I saw a girl drown. I told it just the way I saw it. Is that a crime? Why are you bothering me?"

"Just tell it again, Mr. Courtenoy. Just the way you saw it."

"She was out in the boat," Courtenoy said, sighing. "I was fishing. Her cousin was on the shore. She fell over the side."

"Josie Thompson."

"Yes, Josie Thompson, whatever the hell her name was."

"She was alone in the boat?"

"Yes. She was alone in the boat."

"Go on."

"The other one — Miss Davis — screamed and ran into the water, and began swimming toward her." He shook his head. "She didn't make it in time. That boat was a long way out. When she got there, the lake was still. She dove under and came up, and then dove under again, but it was too late, it was just too late. Then, as she was swimming back, I thought *she* was going to drown, too. She faltered and sank below the surface, and I waited and I thought sure she was gone. Then there was a patch of yellow that broke through the water, and I saw she was all right."

"Why didn't you jump in to help her, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"I don't know how to swim."

"All right. What happened next?"

"She came out of the water — Miss Davis. She was exhausted and hysterical. I tried to calm her down, but she kept yelling and crying, not making any sense at all. I dragged her over to the car, and I asked her for the car keys. She didn't seem to know what I was talking about at first. 'The keys!' I said, and she just stared at me. 'Your car keys!' I yelled. 'The keys to the car.' Finally she reached in her purse and handed me the keys."

"Go on."

"I drove her into town. It was me who told the story to the police. She couldn't talk, all she could do was babble and scream and cry. It was a terrible thing to watch. I'd never before seen a woman so completely off her nut. We couldn't get two straight words out of her until the next day. Then she was all right. Told the police who she was, explained what I'd already told them the day before, and told them the dead girl was her cousin, Josie Thompson. They dragged the lake and got her out of the water. A shame. A real shame. Nice young girl like that."

"What was the dead girl wearing?"

"Cotton dress. Loafers, I think. Or sandals. Little thin sweater over the dress. A cardigan."

"Any jewelry?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Was she carrying a purse?"

"No. Her purse was in the car with Miss Davis'."

"What was Miss Davis wearing?"

"When? The day of the drowning? Or when they pulled her cousin out of the lake?"

"Was she there then?"

"Sure. Identified the body."

"No, I wanted to know what she was wearing on the day of the accident, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Oh, skirt and a blouse, I think. Ribbon in her hair. Loafers. I'm not sure."

"What color blouse? Yellow?"

"No. Blue."

"You said yellow."

“No, blue, I didn’t say yellow.”

Carella frowned. “I thought you said yellow earlier.” He shrugged. “All right, what happened after the inquest?”

“Nothing much. Miss Davis thanked me for being so kind and said she would send me a check for the time I’d missed. I refused at first and then I thought, What the hell, I’m a hard-working man, and money doesn’t grow on trees. So I gave her my address. I figured she could afford it. Driving a Caddy, and hiring a fellow to take it back to the city.”

“Why didn’t she drive it back herself?”

“I don’t know. I guess she was still a little shaken. Listen, that was a terrible experience. Did you ever see anyone die up close?”

“Yes,” Carella said.

From inside the house Courtenoy’s wife yelled, “Sidney, tell those men to get out of our driveway!”

“You heard her,” Courtenoy said, and finished rolling up his garage door.

* * * *

Nobody likes Monday morning.

It was invented for hangovers. It is really not the beginning of a new week, but only the tail end of the week before. Nobody likes it, and it doesn't have to be rainy or gloomy or blue in order to provoke disaffection. It can be bright and sunny and the beginning of August. It can start with a driveway interview at seven a.m. and grow progressively worse by nine-thirty that same morning. Monday is Monday and legislation will never change its personality. Monday is Monday, and it stinks.

By nine-thirty that Monday morning, Detective Steve Carella was on the edge of total bewilderment and, like any normal person, he blamed it on Monday. He had come back to the squadroom and painstakingly gone over the pile of checks Claudia Davis had written during the month of July, a total of twenty-five, searching them for some clue to her strangulation, studying them with the scrutiny of a typographer in a print shop. Several things seemed evident from the checks, but nothing seemed pertinent. He could recall having said: "I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary," and he was beginning to believe he had uttered some famous last words in those two succinct sentences. For if this was the diary of Claudia Davis, it was a singularly unprovocative account that would never make the nation's best-seller lists.

Most of the checks had been made out to clothing or department stores. Claudia, true to the species, seemed to have a penchant for shopping and a checkbook that yielded to her spending urge. Calls to the various stores represented revealed that her taste ranged through a wide variety of items. A check of sales slips showed that she had purchased during the month of July alone three baby doll nightgowns, two half slips, a trenchcoat, a wrist watch, four pairs of tapered slacks in various colors, two pairs of walking shoes, a pair of sunglasses, four bikini swimsuits, eight wash-and-wear frocks, two skirts, two cashmere sweaters, half-a-dozen best-selling novels, a large bottle of aspirin, two bottles of Dramamine, six pieces of luggage, and four boxes of cleansing tissue. The most expensive thing she had purchased was an evening gown costing \$500. These purchases accounted for most of the checks she had drawn in July. There were

also checks to a hairdresser, a florist, a shoemaker, a candy shop, and three unexplained checks that were drawn to individuals, two men and a woman.

The first was made out to George Badueck.

The second was made out to David Oblinsky.

The third was made out to Martha Feldelson.

Someone on the squad had attacked the telephone directory and come up with addresses for two of the three. The third, Oblinsky, had an unlisted number, but a half-hour's argument with a supervisor had finally netted an address for him. The completed list was now on Carella's desk together with all the canceled checks. He should have begun tracking down those names, he knew, but something still was bugging him.

"Why did Courtenoy lie to me and Meyer?" he asked Cotton Hawes. "Why did he lie about something as simple as what Claudia Davis was wearing on the day of the drowning?"

"How did he lie?"

"First he said she was wearing yellow, said he saw a patch of yellow break the surface of the lake. Then he changed it to blue. Why did he do that, Cotton?"

"I don't know."

"And if he lied about that, why couldn't he have been lying about everything? Why couldn't he and Claudia have done in little Josie together?"

"I don't know," Hawes said.

"Where'd that twenty thousand bucks come from, Cotton?"

"Maybe it was a stock dividend."

"Maybe. Then why didn't she simply deposit the check? This was cash, Cotton, *cash*. Now where did it come from? That's a nice piece of change. You don't pick twenty grand out of the gutter."

"I suppose not."

"I know where you can get twenty grand, Cotton."

"Where?"

"From an insurance company. When someone dies." Carella nodded once, sharply. "I'm going to make some calls. Damn it, that money had to come from *someplace*."

He hit pay dirt on his sixth call. The man he spoke to was named Jeremiah Dodd and was a representative of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc. He recognized Josie Thompson's name at once.

"Oh, yes," he said. "We settled that claim in July."

"Who made the claim, Mr. Dodd?"

"The beneficiary, of course. Just a moment. Let me get the folder on this. Will you hold on, please?"

Carella waited impatiently. Over at the insurance company on the other end of the line he could hear muted voices. A girl giggled suddenly, and he wondered who was kissing whom over by the water cooler. At last Dodd came back on the line.

"Here it is," he said. "Josephine Thompson. Beneficiary was her cousin, Miss Claudia Davis. Oh, yes, now it's all coming back. Yes, this is the one."

"What one?"

"Where the girls were mutual beneficiaries."

"What do you mean?"

"The cousins," Dodd said. "There were two life policies. One for Miss Davis and one for Miss Thompson. And they were mutual beneficiaries."

"You mean Miss Davis was the beneficiary of Miss Thompson's policy and vice versa?"

“Yes, that’s right.”

“That’s very interesting. How large were the policies?”

“Oh, very small.”

“Well, how *small* then?”

“I believe they were both insured for twelve thousand five hundred. Just a moment; let me check. Yes, that’s right.”

“And Miss Davis applied for payment on the policy after her cousin died, huh?”

“Yes. Here it is, right here. Josephine Thompson drowned at Lake Triangle on June fourth. That’s right. Claudia Davis sent in the policy and the certificate of death and also a coroner’s jury verdict.”

“She didn’t miss a trick, did she?”

“Sir? I’m sorry, I ...”

“Did you pay her?”

“Yes. It was a perfectly legitimate claim. We began processing it at once.”

“Did you send anyone up to Lake Triangle to investigate the circumstances of Miss Thompson’s death?”

“Yes, but it was merely a routine investigation. A coroner’s inquest is good enough for us, Detective Carella.”

“When did you pay Miss Davis?”

“On July first.”

“You sent her a check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars, is that right?”

“No, sir.”

“Didn’t you say ... ?”

“The policy insured her for twelve-five, that’s correct. But there was a double-indemnity clause, you see, and Josephine Thompson’s death was accidental. No, we had to pay the policy’s limit, Detective Carella. On July first we sent Claudia Davis a check for twenty-five thousand dollars.”

* * * *

There are no mysteries in police work.

Nothing fits into a carefully preconceived scheme. The high point of any given case is very often the corpse that opens the case. There is no climactic progression; suspense is for the movies. There are only people and curiously twisted motives, and small unexplained details, and coincidence, and the unexpected, and they combine to form a sequence of events, but there is no real mystery, there never is. There is only life, and sometimes death, and neither follows a rule book. Policemen hate mystery stories because they recognize in them a control that is lacking in their own very real, sometimes routine, sometimes spectacular, sometimes tedious investigation of a case. It is very nice and very clever and very convenient to have all the pieces fit together neatly. It is very kind to think of detectives as master mathematicians working on an algebraic problem whose constants are death and a victim, whose unknown is a murderer. But many of these mastermind detectives have trouble adding up the deductions on their twice-monthly paychecks. The world is full of wizards, for sure, but hardly any of them work for the city police.

There was one big mathematical discrepancy in the Claudia Davis case.

There seemed to be \$5,000 unaccounted for.

Twenty-five grand had been mailed to Claudia Davis on July 1, and she presumably received the check after the Fourth of July holiday, cashed it someplace, and then took her money to the Seaboard Bank of America, opened a new checking account, and rented a safety-deposit box. But her total deposit at Seaboard had been \$20,000 whereas the check had been for \$25,000, so where was the laggard five? And who had cashed the check for her? Mr. Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., explained the company's rather complicated accounting system to Carella. A check was kept in the local office for several days after it was cashed in order to close out the policy, after which it was sent to the main office in Chicago where it sometimes stayed for several weeks until the master files were closed out. It was then sent to the company's accounting and auditing firm in San Francisco. It was Dodd's guess that the canceled check had

already been sent to the California accountants, and he promised to put a tracer on it at once. Carella asked him to please hurry. Someone had cashed that check for Claudia and, supposedly, someone also had one-fifth of the check's face value.

The very fact that Claudia had not taken the check itself to Seaboard seemed to indicate that she had something to hide. Presumably, she did not want anyone asking questions about insurance company checks, or insurance policies, or double indemnities, or accidental drownings, or especially her cousin Josie. The check was a perfectly good one, and yet she had chosen to cash it *before* opening a new account. Why? And why, for that matter, had she bothered opening a new account when she had a rather well-stuffed and active account at another bank?

There are only whys in police work, but they do not add up to mystery. They add up to work, and nobody in the world likes work. The bulls of the 87th would have preferred to sit on their backsides and sip at gin-and-tonics, but the whys were there, so they put on their hats and their holsters and tried to find some because.

Cotton Hawes systematically interrogated each and every tenant in the rooming house where Claudia Davis had been killed. They all had alibis tighter than the closed fist of an Arabian stablekeeper. In his report to the lieutenant, Hawes expressed the belief that none of the tenants were guilty of homicide. As far as he was concerned, they were all clean.

Meyer Meyer attacked the 87th's stool pigeons. There were money-changers galore in the precinct and the city, men who turned hot loot into cold cash — for a price. If someone had cashed a \$25,000 check for Claudia and kept \$5,000 of it during the process, couldn't that person conceivably be one of the moneychangers? He put the precinct stoolies on the ear, asked them to sound around the word of a Security Insurance Corporation check. The stoolies came up with nothing.

Detective Lieutenant Sam Grossman took his laboratory boys to the murder room and went over it again. And again. And again. He reported that the lock on the door was a snap lock, the kind that clicks shut automatically when the door is slammed. Whoever killed Claudia Davis could have done so without performing any locked-room gymnastics. All he had to do was close the door behind him when he left. Grossman also reported that Claudia's bed had apparently not

been slept in on the night of the murder. A pair of shoes had been found at the foot of a large easy chair in the bedroom and a novel was wedged open on the arm of the chair. He suggested that Claudia had fallen asleep while readings had awakened, and gone into the other room where she had met her murderer and her death. He had no suggestions as to just who that murderer might have been.

Steve Carella was hot and impatient and overloaded. There were other things happening in the precinct, things like burglaries and muggings and knifings and assaults and kids with summertime on their hands hitting other kids with ball bats because they didn't like the way they pronounced the word "*señor*." There were telephones jangling., and reports to be typed in triplicate, and people filing into the squadroom day and night with complaints against the citizenry of that fair city, and the Claudia Davis case was beginning to be a big fat pain in the keester. Carella wondered what it was like to be a shoemaker. And while he was wondering, he began to chase down the checks made out to George Badueck, David Oblinsky, and Martha Feldelson.

Happily, Bert Kling had nothing whatsoever to do with the Claudia Davis case. He hadn't even discussed it with any of the men on the squad. He was a young detective and a new detective, and the things that happened in that precinct were enough to drive a guy nuts and keep him busy forty-eight hours every day, so he didn't go around sticking his nose into other people's cases. He had enough troubles of his own. One of those troubles was the line-up.

On Wednesday morning Bert Kling's name appeared on the line-up duty chart.

* * * * *

The line-up was held in the gym downtown at Headquarters on High Street. It was held four days a week, Monday to Thursday, and the purpose of the parade was to acquaint the city's detectives with the people who were committing crime, the premise being that crime is a repetitive profession and that a crook will always be a crook, and it's good to know who your adversaries are should you happen to come face to face with them on the street. Timely recognition of a thief had helped crack many a case and had, on some occasions, even saved a detective's life. So the line-up was a pretty valuable in-group custom. This didn't mean that detectives enjoyed the trip downtown. They drew line-up perhaps once every two weeks and, often as not, line-up duty fell on their day off, and nobody appreciated rubbing elbows with criminals on his day off.

The line-up that Wednesday morning followed the classic pattern of all line-ups. The detectives sat in the gymnasium on folding chairs, and the chief of detectives sat behind a high podium at the back of the gym. The green shades were drawn, and the stage illuminated, and the offenders who'd been arrested the day before were marched before the assembled bulls while the chief read off the charges and handled the interrogation. The pattern was a simple one. The arresting officer, uniformed or plain-clothes, would join the chief at the rear of the gym when his arrest came up. The chief would read off the felon's name, and then the section of the city in which he'd been arrested, and then a number. He would say, for example, "Jones, John, Riverhead, three." The "three" would simply indicate that this was the third arrest in Riverhead that day. Only felonies and special types of misdemeanors were handled at the line-up, so this narrowed the list of performers on any given day. Following the case number, the chief would read off the offense, and then say either "Statement" or "No statement," telling the assembled cops that the thief either had or had not said anything when they'd put the collar on him. If there had been a statement, the chief would limit his questions to rather general topics since he didn't want to lead the felon into saying anything that might contradict his usually incriminating initial statement, words that could be used against him in court. If there had been *no* statement, the chief would pull out all the stops. He was generally armed with whatever police records were available on the man who stood under the blinding lights, and it was the smart thief who understood the

purpose of the line-up and who knew he was not bound to answer a goddamned thing they asked him. The chief of detectives was something like a deadly earnest Mike Wallace, but the stakes were slightly higher here because this involved something a little more important than a novelist plugging his new book or a senator explaining the stand he had taken on a farm bill. These were truly “interviews in depth,” and the booby prize was very often a long stretch up the river in a cozy one-windowed room.

The line-up bored the hell out of Kling. It always did. It was like seeing a stage show for the hundredth time. Every now and then somebody stopped the show with a really good routine. But usually it was the same old song and dance. It wasn't any different that Wednesday. By the time the eighth offender had been paraded and subjected to the chief's bludgeoning interrogation, Kling was beginning to doze. The detective sitting next to him nudged him gently in the ribs.

“... Reynolds, Ralph,” the chief was saying, “Isola, four. Caught burgling an apartment on North Third. No statement. How about it, Ralph?”

“How about what?”

“You do this sort of thing often?”

“What sort of thing?”

“Burglary.”

“I'm no burglar,” Reynolds said.

“I've got his B-sheet here,” the chief said. “Arrested for burglary in 1948, witness withdrew her testimony, claimed she had mistakenly identified him. Arrested again for burglary in 1952, convicted for Burglary One, sentenced to ten at Castlevue, paroled in '58 on good behavior. You're back at the old stand, huh, Ralph?”

“No, not me. I've been straight ever since I got out.”

“Then what were you doing in that apartment during the middle of the night?”

“I was a little drunk. I must have walked into the wrong building.”

“What do you mean?”

“I thought it was my apartment.”

“Where do you live, Ralph?”

“On . . .uh . . .well.”

“Come on, Ralph.”

“Well, I live on South Fifth.”

“And the apartment you were in last night is on North Third. You must have been pretty drunk to wander that far off course.”

“Yeah, I guess I was pretty drunk.”

“Woman in that apartment said you hit her when she woke up. Is that true, Ralph?”

“No. No, hey, I never hit her.”

“She says so, Ralph.”

“Well, she’s mistaken.”

“Well, now, a doctor’s report says somebody clipped her on the jaw, Ralph, now how about that?”

“Well, maybe.”

“Yes or no?”

“Well, maybe when she started screaming she got me nervous. I mean, you know, I thought it was my apartment and all.”

“Ralph, you were burgling that apartment. How about telling us the truth?”

“No, I got in there by mistake.”

“How’d you get in?”

“The door was open.”

“In the middle of the night, huh? The door was open?”

“Yeah.”

“You sure you didn’t pick the lock or something, huh?”

“No, no. Why would I do that? I thought it was my apartment.”

“Ralph, what were you doing with burglar’s tools?”

“Who? Who me? Those weren’t burglar’s tools.”

“Then what are they? You had a glass cutter, and a bunch of jimmies, and some punches, and a drill and bits, and three celluloid strips, and some lock-picking tools, and eight skeleton keys. Those sound like burglar’s tools to me, Ralph.”

“No, I’m a carpenter.”

“Yeah, you’re a carpenter all right, Ralph. We searched your apartment, Ralph, and found a couple of things we’re curious about. Do you always keep sixteen wrist watches and four typewriters and twelve bracelets and eight rings and a mink stole and three sets of silverware, Ralph?”

“Yeah. I’m a collector.”

“Of other people’s things. We also found four hundred dollars in American currency and five thousand dollars in French francs.

“Where’d you get that money, Ralph?”

“Which?”

“Whichever you feel like telling us about.”

“Well, the U.S. stuff I ... I won at the track. And the other, well, a Frenchman owed me some gold, and so he paid me in francs. That’s all.”

“We’re checking our stolen-goods list right this minute, Ralph.”

“So check!” Reynolds said, suddenly angry. “What the hell do you want from me? Work for your goddamn living! You want it all on a platter! Like fun! I told you everything I’m gonna . . .”

“Get him out of here,” the chief said. “Next, Blake, Donald, Bethtown, two. Attempted rape. No statement . . .”

Bert Kling made himself comfortable on the folding chair and began to doze again.

* * * *

The check made out to George Badueck was numbered 018. It was a small check., five dollars. It did not seem very important to Carella., but it was one of the unexplained three, and he decided to give it a whirl.

Badueck, as it turned out, was a photographer. His shop was directly across the street from the County Court Building in Isola. A sign in his window advised that he took photographs for chauffeurs' licenses, hunting licenses, passports, taxicab permits, pistol permits, and the like. The shop was small and crowded. Badueck fitted into the shop like a beetle in an ant trap. He was a huge man with thick, unruly black hair and the smell of developing fluid on him.

"Who remembers?" he said. "I get millions of people in here every day of the week. They pay me in cash, they pay me with checks, they're ugly, they're pretty, they're skinny, they're fat, they all look the same on the pictures I take. Lousy. They all look like I'm photographing them for you guys. You never see any of these official-type pictures? Man, they look like mug shots, all of them. So who remembers this . . . what's her name? Claudia Davis, yeah. Another face that's all. Another mug shot. Why? Is the check bad or something?"

"No, it's a good check."

"So what's the fuss?"

"No fuss," Carella said. "Thanks a lot."

He sighed and went out into the August heat. The County Court Building across the street was white and Gothic in the sunshine. He wiped a handkerchief across his forehead and thought, *Another face, that's all*. Sighing, he crossed the street and entered the building. It was cool in the high vaulted corridors. He consulted the directory and went up to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles first. He asked the clerk there if anyone named Claudia Davis had applied for a license requiring a photograph.

"We only require pictures on chauffeurs' licenses," the clerk said.

"Well, would you check?" Carella asked.

"Sure. Might take a few minutes, though. Would you have a seat?"

Carella sat. It was very cool. It felt like October. He looked at his watch. It was almost time for lunch, and he was getting hungry. The clerk came back and motioned him over.

"We've got a Claudia Davis listed," he said, "but she's already got a license, and she didn't apply for a new one."

"What kind of license?"

"Operator's."

"When does it expire?"

"Next September."

"And she hasn't applied for anything needing a photo?"

"Nope. Sorry."

"That's all right. Thanks," Carella said.

He went out into the corridor again. He hardly thought it likely that Claudia Davis had applied for a permit to own or operate a taxicab, so he skipped the Hack Bureau and went upstairs to Pistol Permits. The woman he spoke to there was very kind and very efficient. She checked her files and told him that no one named Claudia Davis had ever applied for either a carry or a premises pistol permit. Carella thanked her and went into the hall again. He was very hungry. His stomach was beginning to growl. He debated having lunch and then returning and decided, *Hell, I'd better get it done now.*

The man behind the counter in the Passport Bureau was old and thin and he wore a green eyeshade. Carella asked his question, and the old man went to his files and creakingly returned to the window.

"That's right," he said.

“What’s right?”

“She did. Claudia Davis. She applied for a passport.”

“When?”

The old man checked the slip of paper in his trembling hands.
“July twentieth,” he said.

“Did you give it to her?”

“We accepted her application, sure. Isn’t us who issues the passports. We’ve got to send the application on to Washington.”

“But you did accept it?”

“Sure, why not? Had all the necessary stuff. Why shouldn’t we accept it?”

“What was the necessary stuff?”

“Two photos, proof of citizenship, filled-out application, and cash.”

“What did she show as proof of citizenship?”

“Her birth certificate.”

“Where was she born?”

“California.”

“She paid you in cash?”

“That’s right.”

“Not a check?”

“Nope. She started to write a check, but the blamed pen was on the blink. We use ballpoints, you know, and it gave out after she filled in the application. So she paid me in cash. It’s not all that much money, you know.”

“I see. Thank you,” Carella said.

“Not at all,” the old man replied, and he creaked back to his files to replace the record on Claudia Davis.

* * * *

The check was numbered 007, and it was dated July twelfth, and it was made out to a woman named Martha Feldelson.

Miss Feldelson adjusted her pince-nez and looked at the check. Then she moved some papers aside on the small desk in the cluttered office, and put the check down, and leaned closer to it, and studied it again.

“Yes,” she said, “that check was made out to me. Claudia Davis wrote it right in this office.” Miss Feldelson smiled. “If you can call it an office. Desk space and a telephone. But then, I’m just starting, you know.”

“How long have you been a travel agent, Miss Feldelson?”

“Six months now. It’s very exciting work.”

“Had you ever booked a trip for Miss Davis before?”

“No. This was the first time.”

“Did someone refer her to you?”

“No. She picked my name out of the phone book.”

“And asked you to arrange this trip for her, is that right?”

“Yes.”

“And this check? What’s it for?”

“Her airline tickets, and deposits at several hotels.”

“Hotels *where?*”

“In Paris and Dijon. And then another in Lausanne, Switzerland.”

“She was going to Europe?”

“Yes. From Lausanne she was heading down to the Italian Riviera. I was working on that for her, too. Getting transportation and the hotels, you know.”

“When did she plan to leave?”

“September first.”

“Well, that explains the luggage and the clothes,” Carella said aloud.

“I’m sorry,” Miss Feldelson said, and she smiled and raised her eyebrows.

“Nothings nothing,” Carella said. “What was your impression of Miss Davis?”

“Oh, that’s hard to say. She was only here once, you understand.” Miss Feldelson thought for a moment, and then said, “I suppose she *could* have been a pretty girl if she tried, but she wasn’t trying. Her hair was short and dark, and she seemed rather — well, withdrawn, I guess. She didn’t take her sunglasses off all the while she was here. I suppose you would call her shy. Or frightened. I don’t know.” Miss Feldelson smiled again. “Have I helped you any?”

“Well, now we know she was going abroad,” Carella said.

“September is a good time to go,” Miss Feldelson answered. “In September the tourists have all gone home.” There was a wistful sound to her voice. Carella thanked her for her time and left the small office with its travel folders on the cluttered desk top.

* * * *

He was running out of checks and running out of ideas. Everything seemed to point toward a girl in flight, a girl in hiding, but what was there to hide, what was there to run from? Josie Thompson had been in that boat alone. The coroner's jury had labeled it accidental drowning. The insurance company hadn't contested Claudia's claim, and they'd given her a legitimate check that she could have cashed anywhere in the world. And yet there *was* hiding, and there *was* flight — and he couldn't understand why. He took the list of remaining checks from his pocket. The girl's shoemaker, the girl's hairdresser, a florist, a candy shop. None of them truly important. And the remaining check made out to an individual, the check numbered 006 and dated July eleventh, and written to a man named David Oblinsky in the amount of \$45.75. Carella had his lunch at two-thirty and then went downtown. He found Oblinsky in a diner near the bus terminal. Oblinsky was sitting on one of the counter stools, and he was drinking a cup of coffee. He asked Carella to join him, and Carella did.

"You traced me through that check, huh?" he said. "The phone company gave you my number and my address, huh? I'm unlisted, you know. They ain't suppose to give out my number."

"Well, they made a special concession because it was police business."

"Yeah, well, suppose the cops called and asked for Marlon Brando's number? You think they'd give it out? Like hell they would. I don't like that. No, sir, I don't like it one damn bit."

"What do you do, Mr. Oblinsky? Is there a reason for the unlisted number?"

"I drive a cab is what I do. Sure there's a reason. It's classy to have an unlisted number. Didn't you know that?"

Carella smiled. "No, I didn't."

"Sure, it is."

"Why did Claudia Davis give you this check?" Carella asked.

"Well, I work for a cab company here in this city, you see. But usually on weekends or on my day off I use my own car and I take people on long trips, you know what I mean? Like to the country, or the mountains, or the beach, wherever they want to go. I don't care. I'll take them wherever they want to go."

"I see."

"Sure. So in June sometime, the beginning of June it was, I get a call from this guy I know up at Triangle Lake, he tells me there's a rich broad there who needs somebody to drive her Caddy back to the city for her. He said it was worth thirty bucks if I was willing to take the train up and the heap back. I told him, no sir, I wanted forty-five or it was no deal. I knew I had him over a barrel, you understand? He'd already told me he checked with the local hicks and none of them felt like making the ride. So he said he would talk it over with her and get back to me. Well, he called again . . . you know, it burns me up about the phone company. They ain't suppose to give out my number like that. Suppose it was Marilyn Monroe? You think they'd give out her number? I'm gonna raise a stink about this, believe me."

"What happened when he called you back."

"Well, he said she was willing to pay forty-five, but like could I wait until July sometime when she would send me a check because she was a little short right at the moment. So I figured what the hell, am I going to get stiffed by a dame who's driving a 1960 Caddy? I figured I could trust her until July. But I also told him, if that was the case, then I also wanted her to pay the tolls on the way back, which I don't ordinarily ask my customers to do. That's what the seventy-five cents was for. The tolls."

"So you took the train up there and then drove Miss Davis and the Cadillac back to the city, is that right?"

"Yeah."

"I suppose she was pretty distraught on the trip home."

"Huh?"

"You, know. Not too coherent."

“Huh?”

“Broken up. Crying. Hysterical,” Carella said.

“No. No, she was okay.”

“Well, what I mean is . . .” Carella hesitated. “I assumed she wasn’t capable of driving the car back herself.”

“Yeah, that’s right. That’s why she hired me.”

“Well, then . . .”

“But not because she was broken up or anything.”

“Then why?” Carella frowned. “Was there a lot of luggage? Did she need your help with that?”

“Yeah, sure. Both hers and her cousin’s. Her cousin drowned, you know.”

“Yes. I know that.”

“But anybody coulda helped her with her luggage,” Oblinsky said. “No, that wasn’t why she hired me. She really *needed* me, mister.”

“Why?”

“Why? Because she don’t know how to drive, that’s why.”

Carella stared at him. “You’re wrong,” he said.

“Oh, no,” Oblinsky said. “She can’t drive, believe me. While I was putting the luggage in the trunk, I asked her to start the car, and she didn’t even know how to do that. Hey, you think I ought to raise a fuss with the phone company?”

“I don’t know,” Carella said, rising suddenly. All at once the check made out to Claudia Davis’ hairdresser seemed terribly important to him. He had almost run out of checks, but all at once he had an idea.

The hairdresser's salon was on South Twenty-third, just off Jefferson Avenue. A green canopy covered the sidewalk outside the salon. The words ARTURO MANFREDI, INC., were lettered discreetly in white on the canopy. A glass plaque in the window repeated the name of the establishment and added, for the benefit of those who did not read either *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar* that there were two branches of the shop, one here in Isola and another in "Nassau, the Bahamas." Beneath that, in smaller, more modest letters, were the words "Internationally Renowned." Carella and Hawes went into the shop at four-thirty in the afternoon. Two meticulously coifed and manicured women were sitting in the small reception room, their expensively sleek legs crossed, apparently awaiting either their chauffeurs, their husbands, or their lovers. They both looked up expectantly when the detectives entered, expressed mild disappointment by only slightly raising newly plucked eyebrows, and went back to reading their fashion magazines. Carella and Hawes walked to the desk. The girl behind the desk was a blonde with a brilliant shellacked look and an English finishing school voice.

"Yes?" she said. "May I help you?"

She lost a tiny trace of her poise when Carella flashed his buzzer. She read the raised lettering on the shield, glanced at the photo on the plastic-encased I.D. card, quickly regained her polished calm, and said coolly and unemotionally, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

"We wonder if you can tell us anything about the girl who wrote this check?" Carella said. He reached into his jacket pocket, took out a folded photostat of the check, unfolded it, and put it on the desk before the blonde. The blonde looked at it casually.

"What is the name?" she asked. "I can't make it out."

"Claudia Davis."

"D-A-V-I-S."

"Yes."

"I don't recognize the name," the blonde said. "She's not one of our regular customers."

"But she did make out a check to your salon," Carella said. "She wrote this on July seventh. Would you please check your records and find out why she was here and who took care of her?"

"I'm sorry," the blonde said.

"What?"

"I'm sorry, but we close at five o'clock, and this is the busiest time of the day for us. I'm sure you can understand that. If you'd care to come back a little later . . ."

"No, we wouldn't care to come back a little later," Carella said. "Because if we came back a little later, it would be with a search warrant and possibly a warrant for the seizure of your books, and sometimes that can cause a little commotion among the gossip columnists, and that kind of commotion might add to your international renown a little bit. We've had a long day, miss, and this is important, so how about it?"

"Of course. We're always delighted to cooperate with the police," the blonde said frigidly. "Especially when they're so well mannered."

"Yes, we're all of that," Carella answered.

"Yes. July seventh, did you say?"

"July seventh."

The blonde left the desk and went into the back of the salon. A brunette came out front and said, "Has Miss Marie left for the evening?"

"Who's Miss Marie?" Hawes asked.

"The blond girl."

"No. She's getting something for us."

"That white streak is very attractive," the brunette said. "I'm

Miss Olga.”

“How do you do.”

“Fine, thank you,” Miss Olga said. “When she comes back, would you tell her there’s something wrong with one of the dryers on the third floor?”

“Yes, I will,” Hawes said.

Miss Olga smiled, waved, and vanished into the rear of the salon again. Miss Marie reappeared not a moment later. She looked at Carella and said, “A Miss Claudia Davis was here on July seventh. Mr. Sam worked on her. Would you like to talk to him?”

“Yes, we would.”

“Then follow me, please,” she said curtly.

They followed her into the back of the salon past women who sat with crossed legs, wearing smocks, their heads in hair dryers.

“Oh, by the way,” Hawes said, “Miss Olga said to tell you there’s something wrong with one of the third-floor dryers.”

“Thank you,” Miss Marie said.

Hawes felt particularly clumsy in this world of women’s machines. There was an air of delicate efficiency about the place, and Hawes — six feet two inches tall in his bare soles, weighing in at a hundred and ninety pounds — was certain he would knock over a bottle of nail polish or a pail of hair rinse. As they entered the second-floor salon, as he looked down that long line of humming space helmets at women with crossed legs and what looked like barber’s aprons covering their nylon slips, he became aware of a new phenomenon. The women were slowly turning their heads inside the dryers to look at the white streak over his left temple. He suddenly felt like a horse’s ass. For whereas the streak was the legitimate result of a knifing — they had shaved his red hair to get at the wound, and it had grown back this way — he realized all at once that many of these women had shelled out hard-earned dollars to simulate identical white streaks in their own hair, and he no longer felt like a cop making a business call. Instead, he felt like a customer who had come to have his goddamned streak touched up a little.

"This is Mr. Sam," Miss Marie said, and Hawes turned to see Carella shaking hands with a rather elongated man. The man wasn't particularly tall, he was simply elongated. He gave the impression of being seen from the side seats in a movie theater, stretched out of true proportion, curiously two-dimensional. He wore a white smock, and there were three narrow combs in the breast pocket. He carried a pair of scissors in one thin, sensitive-looking hand.

"How do you do?" he said to Carella, and he executed a half-bow, European in origin, American in execution. He turned to Hawes, took his hand, shook it, and again said, "How do you do?"

"They're from the police," Miss Marie said briskly, releasing Mr. Sam from any obligation to be polite, and then left the men alone.

"A woman named Claudia Davis was here on July seventh," Carella said. "Apparently she had her hair done by you. Can you tell us what you remember about her?"

"Miss Davis, Miss Davis," Mr. Sam said, touching his high forehead in an attempt at visual shorthand, trying to convey the concept of thought without having to do the accompanying brainwork. "Let me see, Miss Davis, Miss Davis."

"Yes."

"Yes, Miss Davis. A very pretty blonde."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "A brunette. You're thinking of the wrong person."

"No, I'm thinking of the right person," Mr. Sam said. He tapped his temple with one extended forefinger, another piece of visual abbreviation. "I remember. Claudia Davis. A blonde."

"A brunette," Carella insisted, and he kept watching Mr. Sam.

"When she left. But when she came, a blonde."

"What?" Hawes said.

"She was a blonde, a very pretty, natural blonde. It is rare. Natural blondness, I mean. I couldn't understand why she wanted to

change the color.”

“You dyed her hair?” Hawes asked.

“That is correct.”

“Did she say *why* she wanted to be a brunette?”

“No, sir. I argued with her. I said, ‘You have *beautiful* hair, I can do marvelous things with this hair of yours. You are a *blonde*, my dear, there are drab women who come in here every day of the week and *beg* to be turned into blondes.’ No. She would not listen. I dyed it for her.” Mr. Sam seemed to be offended by the idea all over again. He looked at the detectives as if they had been responsible for the stubbornness of Claudia Davis.

“What else did you do for her, Mr. Sam?” Carella asked.

“The dye, a cut, and a set. And I believe one of the girls gave her a facial and a manicure.”

“What do you mean by a cut? Was her hair long when she came here?”

“Yes, beautiful long blond hair. She wanted it cut. I cut it.” Mr. Sam shook his head. “A pity. She looked terrible. I don’t usually say this about someone I work on, but she walked out of here looking terrible. You would hardly recognize her as the same pretty blonde who came in not three hours before.”

“Maybe that was the idea,” Carella said.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Forget it. Thank you, Mr. Sam. We know you’re busy.”

In the street outside Hawes said, “You knew before we went in there, didn’t you, Mr. Steve?”

“I suspected, Mr. Cotton, I suspected. Come on, let’s get back to the squad.”

* * * *

They kicked it around like a bunch of advertising executives. They sat in Lieutenant Byrnes' office and tried to find out how the cookie crumbled and which way the Tootsie rolled. They were just throwing out a life preserver to see if anyone grabbed at it, that's all. What they were doing, you see, was running up the flag to see if anyone saluted, that's all. The lieutenant's office was a four-window office because he was top man in this particular combine. It was a very elegant office. It had an electric fan all its own, and a big wide desk. It got cross ventilation from the street. It was really very pleasant. Well, to tell the truth, it was a pretty ratty office in which to be holding a top-level meeting, but it was the best the precinct had to offer. And after a while you got used to the chipping paint and the soiled walls and the bad lighting and the stench of urine from the men's room down the hall. Peter Byrnes didn't work for B.B.D. & O. He worked for the city. Somehow, there was a difference.

"I just put in a call to Irene Miller," Carella said. "I asked her to describe Claudia Davis to me, and she went through it all over again. Short dark hair, shy, plain. Then I asked her to describe the cousin, Josie Thompson." Carella nodded glumly. "Guess what?"

"A pretty girl," Hawes said. "A pretty girl with long blond hair."

"Sure. Why, Mrs. Miller practically spelled it out the first time we talked to her. It's all there in the report. She said they were like black and white in looks and personality. Black and white, sure. A brunette and a goddamn blonde!"

"That explains the yellow," Hawes said.

"What yellow?"

"Courtenoy. He said he saw a patch of yellow breaking the surface. He wasn't talking about her clothes, Steve. He was talking about her *hair*"

"It explains a lot of things," Carella said. "It explains why shy Claudia Davis was preparing for her European trip by purchasing baby doll nightgowns and bikini bathing suits. And it explains why the

undertaker up there referred to Claudia as a pretty girl. And it explains why our necropsy report said she was thirty when everybody talked about her as if she were much younger.”

“The girl who drowned wasn’t Josie, huh?” Meyer said. “You figure she was Claudia.”

“Damn right I figure she was Claudia.”

“And you figure she cut her hair afterward, and dyed it, and took her cousin’s name, and tried to pass as her cousin until she could get out of the country, huh?” Meyer said.

“Why?” Byrnes said. He was a compact man with a compact bullet head and a chunky economical body. He did not like to waste time or words.

“Because the trust income was in Claudia’s name. Because Josie didn’t have a dime of her own.”

“She could have collected on her cousin’s insurance policy,” Meyer said.

“Sure, but that would have been the end of it. The trust called for those stocks to be turned over to U.C.L.A. if Claudia died. A college, for God’s sake! How do you suppose Josie felt about that? Look, I’m not trying to hand a homicide on her. I just think she took advantage of a damn good situation. Claudia was in that boat alone. When she fell over the side, Josie really tried to rescue her, no question about it. But she missed, and Claudia drowned. Okay. Josie went all to pieces, couldn’t talk straight, crying, sobbing, real hysterical woman, we’ve seen them before. But came the dawn. And with the dawn, Josie began thinking. They were away from the city, strangers in a strange town. Claudia had drowned but no one *knew* that she was Claudia. No one but Josie. She had no identification on her, remember? Her purse was in the car. Okay. If Josie identified her cousin correctly, she’d collect twenty-five grand on the insurance policy, and then all that stock would be turned over to the college, and that would be the end of the gravy train. But suppose, just suppose Josie told the police the girl in the lake was Josie Thompson? Suppose she said, ‘I, Claudia Davis, tell you that girl who drowned is my cousin, Josie Thompson’?”

Hawes nodded. “Then she’d still collect on an insurance policy,

and also fall heir to those fat security dividends coming in.”

“Right. What does it take to cash a dividend check? A bank account, that’s all. A bank account with an established signature. So all she had to do was open one, sign her name as Claudia Davis, and then endorse every dividend check that came in exactly the same way.”

“Which explains the new account,’ Meyer said. “She couldn’t use Claudia’s old account because the bank undoubtedly knew both Claudia *and* her signature. So Josie had to forfeit the sixty grand at Highland Trust and start from scratch.”

“And while she was building a new identity and a new fortune,” Hawes said, “just to make sure Claudia’s few friends forgot all about her, Josie was running off to Europe. She may have planned to stay there for years.”

“It all ties in,” Carella said. “Claudia had a driver’s license. She was the one who drove the car away from Stewart City. But Josie had to hire a chauffeur to take her back?”

“And would Claudia, who was so meticulous about money matters, have kept so many people waiting for payment?” Hawes said. “No, sir. That was Josie. And Josie was broke, Josie was waiting for that insurance policy to pay off so she could settle those debts and get the hell out of the country.”

“Well, I admit it adds up,” Meyer said. Peter Byrnes never wasted words. “Who cashed that twenty-five-thousand-dollar check for Josie?” he said.

There was silence in the room.

“Who’s got that missing five grand?” he said.

There was another silence.

“Who *killed* Josie?” he said.

* * * * *

Jeremiah Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., did not call until two days later. He asked to speak to Detective Carella, and when he got him on the phone, he said, "Mr. Carella, I've just heard from San Francisco on that check."

"What check?" Carella asked. He had been interrogating a witness to a knifing in a grocery store on Culver Avenue. The Claudia Davis or rather the Josie Thompson case was not quite yet in the Open File, but it was ready to be dumped there, and was truly the farthest thing from Carella's mind at the moment.

"The check was paid to Claudia Davis," Dodd said.

"Oh, yes. Who cashed it?"

"Well, there are two endorsements on the back. One was made by Claudia Davis, of course. The other was made by an outfit called Leslie Summers, Inc. It's a regular company stamp marked 'For Deposit Only' and signed by one of the officers."

"Have any idea what sort of a company that is?" Carella asked.

"Yes," Dodd said. "They handle foreign exchange."

"Thank you," Carella said.

He went there with Bert Kling later that afternoon. He went with Kling completely by chance and only because Kling was heading downtown to buy his mother a birthday gift and offered Carella a ride. When they parked the car, Kling asked, "How long will this take, Steve?"

"Few minutes, I guess."

"Want to meet me back here?"

"Well, I'll be at 720 Hall, Leslie Summers, Inc. If you're through before me, come on over."

“Okay, I’ll see you,” Kling said.

They parted on Hall Avenue without shaking hands. Carella found the street-level office of Leslie Summers, Inc., and walked in. A counter ran the length of the room, and there were several girls behind it. One of the girls was speaking to a customer in French and another was talking Italian to a man who wanted lire in exchange for dollars. A board behind the desk quoted the current exchange rate for countries all over the world. Carella got in line and waited. When he reached the counter, the girl who’d been speaking French said, “Yes, sir?”

“I’m a detective,” Carella said. He opened his wallet to where his shield was pinned to the leather. “You cashed a check for Miss Claudia Davis sometime in July. An insurance-company check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Would you happen to remember it?”

“No, sir, I don’t think I handled it.”

“Would you check around and see who did, please?”

The girl held a brief consultation with the other girls, and then walked to a desk behind which sat a corpulent, balding man with a razor-thin mustache. They talked with each other for a full five minutes. The man kept waving his hands. The girl kept trying to explain about the insurance-company check. The bell over the front door sounded. Bert Kling came in, looked around, saw Carella, and joined him at the counter.

“All done?” Carella asked.

“Yeah, I bought her a charm for her bracelet. How about you?”

“They’re holding a summit meeting,” Carella said.

The fat man waddled over to the counter. “What is the trouble?” he asked Carella.

“No trouble. Did you cash a check for twenty-five thousand dollars?”

“Yes. Is the check no good?”

“It’s a good check.”

"It looked like a good check. It was an insurance-company check. The young lady waited while we called the company. They said it was bona fide and we should accept it. Was it a bad check?"

"No, no, it was fine."

"She had identification. It all seemed very proper."

"What did she show you?"

"A driver's license or a passport is what we usually require. But she had neither. We accepted her birth certificate. After all, we *did* call the company. Is the check no good?"

"It's fine. But the check was for twenty-five thousand, and we're trying to find out what happened to five thousand of . . ."

"Oh, yes. The francs."

"What?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of French francs," the fat man said. "She was going abroad?"

"Yes, she was going abroad," Carella said. He sighed heavily. "Well, that's that. I guess."

"It all seemed very proper," the fat man insisted.

"Oh, it was, it was. Thank you. Come on, Bert."

They walked down Hall Avenue in silence.

"Beats me," Carella said.

"What's that, Steve?"

"This case." He sighed again. "Oh, what the hell!"

"Yeah, let's get some coffee. What was all that business about the francs?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of francs," Carella said.

"The French are getting a big play lately, huh?" Kling said, smiling. "Here's a place. This look okay?"

"Yeah, fine." Carella pulled open the door of the luncheonette. "What do you mean, Bert?"

"With the francs."

"What about them?"

"The exchange rate must be very good."

"I don't get you."

"You know. All those francs kicking around."

"Bert, what the hell are you talking about?"

"Weren't you with me? Last Wednesday?"

"With you where?"

"The line-up. I thought you were with me."

"No, I wasn't," Carella said tiredly.

"Oh, well, that's why."

"That's why what? Bert, for the love of. . ."

"That's why you don't remember him."

"Who?"

"The punk they brought in on that burglary pickup. They found five grand in French francs in his apartment."

Carella felt as if he'd just been hit by a truck.

* * * *

It had been crazy from the beginning. Some of them are like that. The girl had looked black, but she was really white. They thought she was Claudia Davis, but she was Josie Thompson. And they had been looking for a murderer when all there happened to be was a burglar.

They brought him up from his cell where he was awaiting trial for Burglary One. He came up in an elevator with a police escort. The police van had dropped him off at the side door of the Criminal Courts Building, and he had entered the corridor under guard and been marched down through the connecting tunnel and into the building that housed the district attorney's office, and then taken into the elevator. The door of the elevator opened into a tiny room upstairs. The other door of the room was locked from the outside and a sign on it read No ADMITTANCE.

The patrolman who'd brought Ralph Reynolds up to the interrogation room stood with his back against the elevator door all the while the detectives talked to him, and his right hand was on the butt of his Police Special.

"I never heard of her," Reynolds said.

"Claudia Davis," Carella said. "Or Josie Thompson. Take your choice."

"I don't know either one of them. What the hell *is* this? You got me on a burglary rap, now you try to pull in everything was done in this city?"

"Who said anything was done, Reynolds?"

"If nothing was done, why'd you drag me up here?"

"They found five thousand bucks in French francs in your pad, Reynolds. Where'd you get it?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Don't get snotty, Reynolds! Where'd you get that money?"

guy.”
“A guy owed it to me. He paid me in francs. He was a French

“What’s his name?”

“I can’t remember.”

“You’d better start trying.”

“Pierre something.”

“Pierre what?” Meyer said.

“Pierre La Salle, something like that. I didn’t know him too
good.”

“But you lent him five grand, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“What were you doing on the night of August first?”

“Why? What happened on August first?”

“You tell us.”

“I don’t know what I was doing.”

“Were you working?”

“I’m unemployed.”

“You know what we mean!”

“No. What do you mean?”

“Were you breaking into apartments?”

“No.”

“Speak up! Yes or no?”

“I said no.”

"He's lying, Steve," Meyer said.

"Sure he is."

"Yeah, sure I am. Look, cop, you got nothing on me but Burglary One, if that. And that you gotta prove in court. So stop trying to hang anything else on me. You ain't got a chance."

"Not unless those prints check out," Carella said quickly.

"What prints?"

"The prints we found on the dead girl's throat," Carella lied.

"I was wearing . . . !"

The small room went as still as death.

Reynolds sighed heavily. He looked at the floor.

"You want to tell us?"

"No," he said. "Go to hell."

He finally told them. After twelve hours of repeated questioning he finally broke down. He hadn't meant to kill her, he said. He didn't even know anybody was in the apartment. He had looked in the bedroom, and the bed was empty. He hadn't seen her asleep in one of the chairs, fully dressed. He had found the French money in a big jar on one of the shelves over the sink. He had taken the money and then accidentally dropped the jar, and she woke up and came into the room and saw him and began screaming. So he grabbed her by the throat. He only meant to shut her up. But she kept struggling. She was very strong. He kept holding on, but only to shut her up. She kept struggling, so he had to hold on. She kept struggling as if ... as if he's really been trying to kill her, as if she didn't want to lose her life. But that was manslaughter, wasn't it? He wasn't trying to kill her. That wasn't homicide, was it?

"I didn't mean to kill her!" he shouted as they took him into the elevator. "She began screaming! I'm not a killer! Look at me! Do I look like a killer?" And then, as the elevator began dropping to the basement, he shouted, "I'm a burglar!" as if proud of his profession, as

if stating that he was something more than a common thief, a trained workman, a skilled artisan. "I'm not a killer! I'm a burglar!" he screamed. "I'm not a killer! I'm not a killer!" And his voice echoed down the elevator shaft as the car dropped to the basement and the waiting van.

They sat in the small room for several moments after he was gone.

"Hot in here," Meyer said.

"Yeah." Carella nodded.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Maybe he's right," Meyer said. "Maybe he's only a burglar."

"He stopped being that the minute he stole a life, Meyer."

"Josie Thompson stole a life, too."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "She only borrowed one. There's a difference, Meyer."

The room went silent.

"You feel like some coffee?" Meyer asked.

"Sure."

They took the elevator down and then walked out into the brilliant August sunshine. The streets were teeming with life. They walked into the human swarm, but they were curiously silent.

At last Carella said, "I guess I think she shouldn't be dead. I guess I think that someone who tried so hard to make a life shouldn't have had it taken away from her."

Meyer put his hand on Carella's shoulder. "Listen," he said earnestly. "It's a job. It's only a job."

"Sure," Carella said. "It's only a job."

* * * *